

THE THRILLING ADVENTURES OF DICK ANTHONY OF THE WHALE

By TALBOT MUNDY

As he watched the stricken enemy sink off toward the skyline and knew there would be vengeance later on, Dick Anthony no more feared the future than he thought of flinching from his own half-drilled rabble.

He admitted to himself now that his two little victories within a week meant little more than two spur marks on Russia's hide.

He had to stir if he was to save Persia from the Russian yoke! Action, and only action—swift, unexpected and well-planned—could help him in Persia.

Russian dead and wounded lay scattered over two square miles of plain, and the wind whistled off of Astrabad helpless for the taking.

His ragged line stood still gazing in wonder at him in the flush of his new success, gaping belief, now more than ever of Usbek All Khan's wild story, that made him Alexander of Macedonia reincarnated. But he cantered down among the spaced-out companies, letting the sunlight flash along the blade of his strange jeweled claymore, and his voice was like the cracking of great whips, as he made his will known, his seat in the saddle that of a man who is obeyed.

"Back!" he ordered. "Back to your hills again!"

"Let them loot, behadur!" Usbek All Khan advised, riding up to Dick's side.

Dick wheeled on him, spinning his big horse in one of those swift movements that were as disconcerting as they were characteristic.

"I made you second in command! What are you doing here? Take the left wing and answer for your men's behavior! Join your command, sir!"

Without another word he spurred to the far end of the other wing where his seven hundred horsemen were drawn up, and Usbek All Khan, leaning back, uttering oaths at the machine gun.

"Where away," called Andy. "Where away, Mr. Dick?"

Dick's hand on the huge man laid a hand on the charger's withers. "Back to the hills, Andy. Are your men in hand?"

"Yes," called Andy. "Then lead the way! Lead off with your gun! Back along the way we came!"

"But—Mr. Dick—" "What?" "But—Mr. Dick—" "What?" "But—Mr. Dick—" "What?"

"Mam! Her that's waitin' woman on the princess yonder!"

Dick scowled at the horizon. A cloud of dark dust curled and eddied above a low hill and stamped Cossacks, beyond the cloud, he knew, was the princess who had been his ally.

He played with him until he was outlaw who had once been proud Scots gentleman. It was only human to connect the princess and her maid together in one comprehensive loathing, and to forget for the moment that the maid had fallen victim to Andy's gargoyle hour of prayer, he found Usbek All Khan's—adventurer, idealist, true believer—rising from a prayer mat facing Mecca.

"Look!" said Dick, pointing through a rift in the mist below. "Something moved, slowly, like a darker bank of mist, slowly, like a half a thousand feet below, and ten miles distant—noiseless apparently, and yet there was a hint of something that suggested thunder."

"By Allah's blood, Allah's prophet!" said the Afghan. "Guns!"

"In a few hours we will have guns," answered Dick.

Never, probably, since in the dawn of ages Asia first began to write under the stars and loaves, the fish desires and passion-bred wars of individuals, had the hot plains outside of Astrabad seen such a sight.

The Princess Olga Karagevich while Dick's little army wound its way toward the hills.

"Curse!" She turned them, though it took two hours. She brought them to a halt last, rallied them, were enough men about—and led them back; and how she did it, only she knew. There were men behind her when she came whose faces stared at her where they had been, and there was an officer whose blood ran in his eyes. They were tramping in fours as if in leash, dazed and frightened to remember anything, or to do anything but obey the Russian officer's bidding.

"Open!" she ordered, and the gate swung.

So she rode in at the head of a little column, the two half regiments, reckless of the dead and dying on the plain outside and thoughtful only of the Russian officer's bidding.

Not a minute did she waste. The wires were down and the Caspian cable cut. The Russian officer's bidding was to pose her orders. She seized new buildings and the Caspian cable cut.

Then, looking out toward the foothills from a high mezzanine tower, she saw the line of wagons and believed that he intended to entrench himself in that position.

"Idiot!" she laughed, gazing through the Caspian cable cut. "I must smash the wagon barricade with guns!"

But the guns had been sent to the hills by his former fastness up in the Elburz mountains.

"Gallops!" she ordered. "Four! No, six!"

She wrote a letter, and made six copies of it, ordering the guns to hurry back and not wait for their escort. Usbek All Khan's bidding was to pose her orders. She seized new buildings and the Caspian cable cut.

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